

BT

771

.M53

FAITH
BUILDING

William R. Merrill

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

BT-771
Chap. Copyright No.

Shelf. M 53

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

FAITH BUILDING

By

✓
WILLIAM P. MERRILL

Pastor of the Sixth Presbyterian Church
Chicago, Ill.



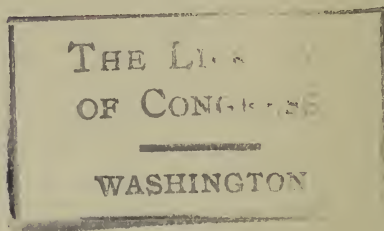
46042-B²-1

Philadelphia :
Presbyterian Board of Publication
and Sabbath-school Work
1896

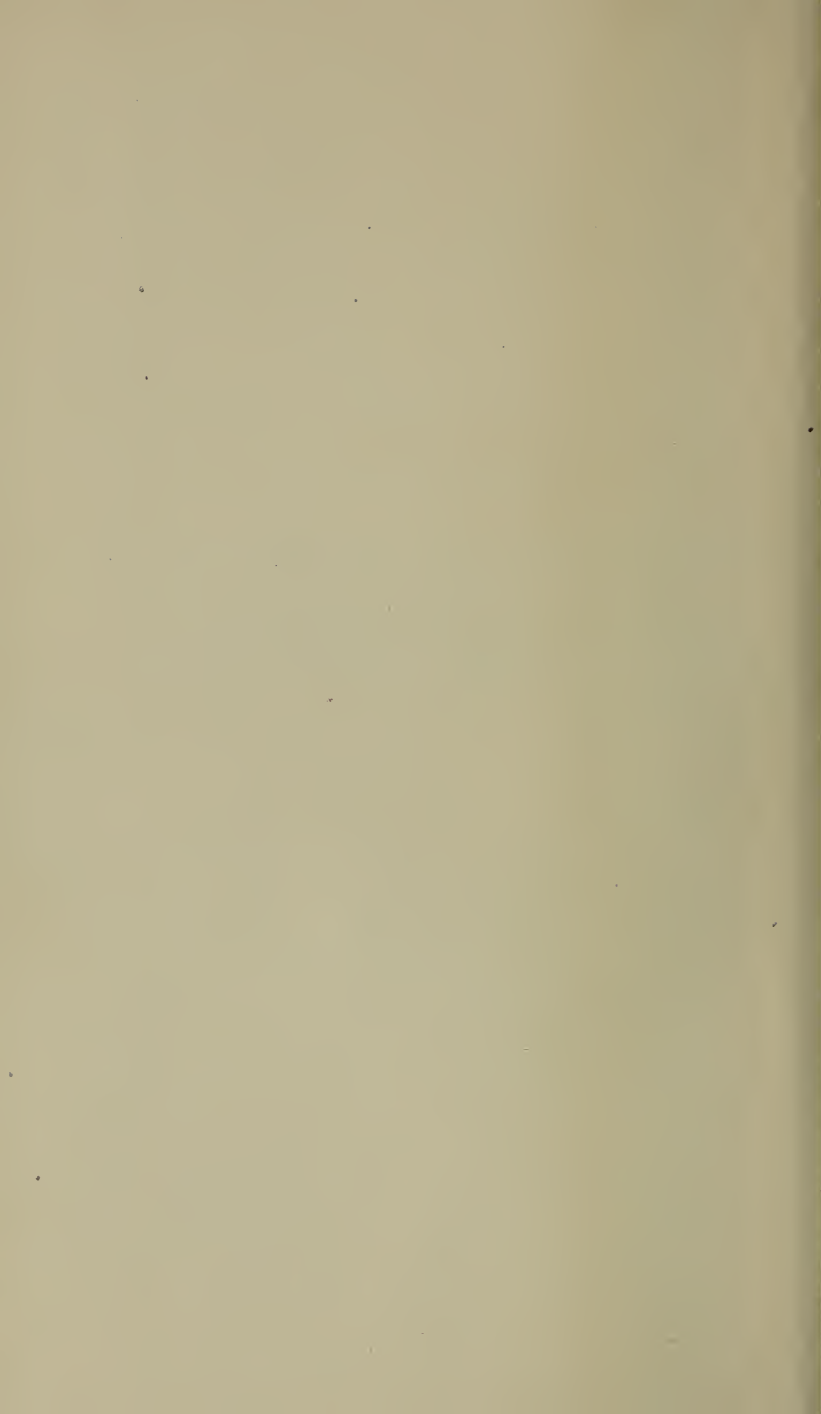
— A —

BT 771
.M 53

COPYRIGHT, 1896, BY
THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN BOARD
OF PUBLICATION AND SABBATH-
SCHOOL WORK.

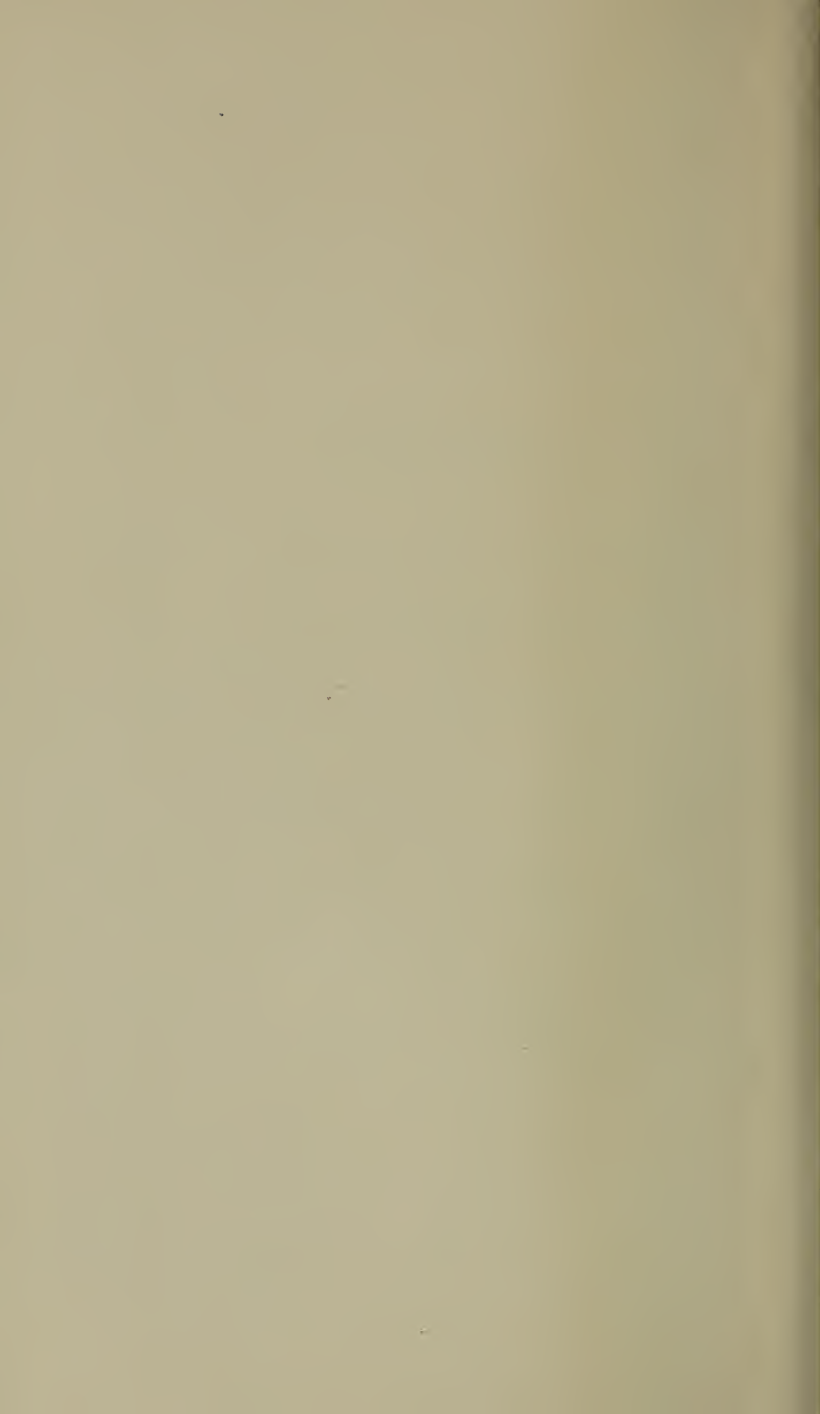


TO the earnest, honest young people of our day, who are doubtful in the midst of their faith, and faithful in the midst of their doubt, these thoughts are given by one of their brothers.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
I. DEALING WITH DOUBT. . . .	7
II. THE ONE FOUNDATION. . . .	25
III. THE ONE TRUTH	43
IV. THE ONE DUTY	55
V. THE CONDITIONS OF PROGRESS . .	67



I.

DEALING WITH DOUBT.

THERE was a man who built a house for himself. He paid careful attention to every detail of it. He saw that the rubbish and earth were cleared away till a solid foundation could be laid; then he watched the stones as they were put in place; he studied the plans and saw that they were carried out. And so at last he had a house that was safe, convenient and satisfactory. He was a wise man.

There was another man who had a house to live in, which belonged to him as truly as the house first mentioned belonged to the man who built it. And yet he did not build it, or see it erected. His father had lived in it, and his father's father. It was well-built, substantial; it had stood the test of time. The man who owned it was thoroughly satisfied with it; he felt sure it was in good condition. Sometimes when he saw a new house going up, he would wonder whether that old dwelling of his was all right, whether it might not be better to build a

Faith Building.

new one. But such thoughts would quickly go, for he knew what his house was, and he would not tear it down just because it was old. He said often to himself, "I would rather have that than one of the new dwellings, for it has been tested thoroughly." He, too, was a wise man.

Then there was a third man. He also had a house to live in which was his. And yet he never felt that it was his. His father and grandfather had lived in it; it was well-built, substantial; it was almost exactly like his neighbor's house. And yet he never felt sure of it; he did not know just how it had stood the test of time. And so at last he had a thorough inspection made. He went down and saw what the foundations were, and how they were laid. He saw how the house was built upon the foundation. Parts of the structure he had torn down and built up again. It was not so very different when he finished; it was really no safer and no better, but it suited him better, it was more truly his own, and he was now sure that it was safe and secure. He too was a wise man.

All this is a parable about faith. Does it need interpretation? Some men build their own belief. Most of us get our faith ready made. It meets our needs, it satisfies

Dealing with Doubt.

our intellects and our hearts. And some inherit their faith, yet are not quite satisfied with it. They want to test the foundations, and see how the rest is built. They cannot be quite secure till they know for themselves. Each class is wise. If the faith you have inherited can satisfy you, then rest in it and be happy ; if it does not, then do not hesitate to question it, test it, and find out whether it is really secure.

These words are not for the large number who are in the second class ; they are for those who are seeking to form, or to re-form, their faith. They are not for the ninety and nine who are secure in their faith, but for the one who is wandering in doubt. How can we form a Christian faith ? Many earnest souls are asking that question. Many who would not let others know it are asking themselves, " How can I make for myself a belief that shall be real and substantial to me, to which I can trust because I know it is trustworthy ? " There are not a few earnest souls who are unsettled. That is not altogether bad. In an unsettled liquid, all the material is present. It only has not as yet taken shape and solidified. But the liquid is cloudy till its contents do settle ; and the sooner this happens the sooner it will be clear and bright. It may be well for one

Faith Building.

who has been through that very experience in which faith and unfaith strangely struggle together, and old thoughts and beliefs are put to severe tests, in which the old structure is almost altogether torn down and then slowly rebuilt, to be at last not so very different in form from what it was before, yet mightily different in reality to the man who has seen it built and so can trust it, it may be well for one who has gone through that experience, and has grown from the condition in which many things were half-certain, to the state in which some things are sure as life itself, to tell some of the simple things that he learned, and how he built up a faith which, whatever its defects may be, is at any rate securely founded and real. There are many Christians in doubt. They have a practical faith, but they are uncertain about it. They believe and yet they do not believe. This is a state of mind that is hard to endure. If everything were black or white, it would be easy for us to discriminate; but the trouble is there are so many shades of gray. We cannot always say, this man, this thing, is good, and that bad. There is some good in the bad, and some bad in the good. So with our belief. We cannot always say positively, "I believe this," and, just as positively, "I do not be-

Dealing with Doubt.

lieve that." Often we do not know. We believe, and yet we cry out for help in our unbelief. We are sure enough to act, and yet, after all, the questions come up, "How am I sure?" "What does my faith really rest upon?" "Do I believe just because I have been told to?" "This point and that I accept as true, but does it really mean anything to me?" Such questions arise again and again. What shall we do with them?

Now I think there is a tendency in our minds to teach others, and to say to ourselves, that such doubts are sinful; that we ought to put them out of the way as dangerous; that they are suggestions of the devil.

"You say, but with no touch of scorn,
Sweet-hearted you, whose light blue eyes
Are tender over drowning flies,
You tell me doubt is devil-born."

Is this the way in which we should treat these questionings? No, there is a better way. Let those who are well-satisfied with their faith rest in it, and be happy. We are glad they can be. But some of us cannot be happy in a faith of which we are not personally certain, any more than we could be at peace in a house of the strength and se-

Faith Building.

curity of which we felt doubtful. Let us first of all look this matter of doubt squarely in the face, see what it is, and what we ought to do with it.

There are three varieties of doubt, corresponding to the three great parts of our nature. We may have a clear faith in one part of our nature combined with a cloudy faith in another.

First of all is *Moral Doubt*. Not many men fall into that, at least not many earnest men. It is the worst and hardest of all the kinds of unbelief. I mean by it the doubt that right is right, and wrong wrong, the losing of moral distinctions; the belief that practically right and wrong are matters of little consequence. To put it in the strong words of Frederick Robertson, the first article of faith is that it must be right to do right. If a man doubts that, it is hard for any truth to reach him. A man who does not cling to the right as the thing for him to do whatever comes, cannot even start to build a character.

This kind of doubt is almost always the result of sin, of some sin that defies the conscience and hardens it. Tennyson gives a wonderful example of it in the "Vision of Sin." The youth whom he there describes sees no virtue in any one or anything; he

Dealing with Doubt.

sneers at the thought of there being anything really good, or really worth struggling for. Pilate is an example of this moral doubt. "What is truth?" he asked. He had lived such a life of untruth that he did not believe there was such a thing as truth, or if there was, he did not think it of any importance. He had a half-pity, half-contempt for this young Galilean country teacher who was ready to give his life for *the truth*.

This moral doubt may be combined with an intellectual faith; but there is no value in the clearest mental faith where this moral unbelief goes along with it. One whose life is willfully dishonest towards his own conscience cannot build a true strong faith, any more than one can build a true and strong house, if he holds his line persistently out of plumb and then builds by that.

If you have such doubt as that, you must learn and realize the tremendous fact that moral doubt kills the soul. The only hope of safety and progress in your faith and life lies in your getting rid of moral doubt through getting full of moral faith. But most of those to whom these words are given are morally in earnest; they believe in right living; they mean to live rightly; they earnestly try to live rightly, even though they

Faith Building.

are in the dark about many things. And so I speak of this first form of doubt chiefly to give a word of cheer. For I believe it is the only kind that is permanently hurtful, the only kind that is always evil, the only kind against which we ought to shut our nature tightly. If ever the suggestion comes to you to ignore the difference between right and wrong, kill it as you would a poisonous snake. But any one who persistently clings to his moral faith has a right to hope for the full light.

The second form of uncertainty is *Intellectual Doubt*. This is where many find trouble. I mean uncertainty as to what is true, and as to how we know what is true. Our time affords good soil for such doubt to flourish in. There are many new theories abroad; it is a time of study and discovery. New light has broken upon men's minds, and it takes time for the old faith and the new truth to adjust themselves the one to the other. There are new ideas, possibly true, possibly false, certainly persistent, about God, about the Bible, about Christ and his mission. Every great fact of the Christian religion is thus questioned and debated, and it is but natural that those who think should be in a state of uncertainty on one point and another. Perhaps their life is just as

Dealing with Doubt.

good as ever, perhaps God sees that their faith is as real ; but to them their faith seems insecure ; they do not know upon what it rests, and they want to know. "What shall I believe? I used to receive all that was said about all these points with implicit faith. I cannot do that now. I want to believe because I see the truth." More men and women are thinking for themselves now than there have ever been before ; and yet they have perhaps less time to do their thinking than ever before. That means uncertainty and darkness to some of them, quite often to the most earnest and honest of them.

Now this intellectual doubt may be combined with a real earnest, practical faith. The one who is thus unsettled about the truth often goes on and works for what he does know ; works for Christ, even while he is wondering about his claims ; works for the kingdom of God, even while uncertain about the reality of it. Some of the most faithful church workers I have ever known have confessed to me that they had this kind of doubt, that they felt sure of little of what they were supposed to believe. That is not strange. Among the twelve whom Jesus selected to be his apostles, there was one who had this intellectual doubt, who suffered

Faith Building.

from it all through his history, so far as we can trace it. When Jesus was about to go to raise Lazarus from the dead, Thomas said: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." He was faithful to Jesus, ready to die with him; and yet he was very doubtful about the wisdom of Jesus' going to that place. He was in the dark mentally, even though his practical faith was stronger than that of any other of the twelve. This combination is not hopeless by any means. Often the man who is full of practical trust, and almost in despair intellectually, if he only goes on, will reach a clearer faith. Thomas did. Intellectual doubt, if honest and sincere, is often only a step towards a better and higher faith. One who is on a peak of the mountain has to go down first, if he would stand at last upon a higher peak. Every step may lead him into a thicker fog, at first, but every step also brings him nearer to the greater height and the clearer air.

And yet, granting all this, while mental doubt is not hopeless, while it is often a step towards the light, we ought to make it truly a step; we ought earnestly to desire to get rid of it, to get a firm, simple, strong, mental faith, that shall give us security and happiness in our religious thinking. Intellectual faith is not the main thing, but it is a thing

Dealing with Doubt.

that means much. To have a simple, strong creed, that is really *your own*, made your own by conquest, which you believe with all your mind, is an element of power and of peace the value of which it would be hard to overestimate. Find some truths which are as sure as life itself, and live by them; then you will find peace.

There is one more kind of doubt of which to speak. We may call it *Spiritual Uncertainty*. I mean by this, the experience of one who finds it hard to make his faith real and living. He believes strongly enough, perhaps; he lives practically by what he believes. Yet spiritually he is dead. He does not feel the presence of God as a real help and a real fact in his life. God is not real to him, as his friends are. There is not much use or value in prayer for him, for he does not feel that it takes him into the presence of any real person. He knows that spiritual realities are in the world, but he cannot realize them. There are many Christians in this day who are in something of that condition. They believe the truths of the Christian religion when they think about them; their reason accepts them; they work earnestly for the right: but God and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the eternal life, are thoughts to them, not realities.

Faith Building.

Their spiritual side is cold, almost dead. It is not hard to see why this is so. Our time has seen a great cultivation of the powers that deal with the world of matter. Charles Darwin, who is more than any other man responsible for the new impulse given to thought, confessed that he had never had time to give to the spiritual side of his nature. The realistic tendency is strong, in science, in fiction, in philosophy, in preaching. All this emphasis on the seen makes it hard to realize the unseen, the ideal, the eternal.

It hurts us to have such doubt as this, even when with it there goes a mental correctness and moral earnestness. The one who lacks spiritual faith misses the great inspiration to true and noble living. One whose spiritual vision is weak and poor may get along, and live a true, honest, manly life. But it will be a hard task; his life will miss much of the happiness and inspiration which Christ came to bring into the religious life of man. We ought to want, to cry out for, earnestly to work for, a strong, true spiritual faith.

What shall we do with such doubts? The way to get rid of doubt is to get full of faith. As we try, step by step, to see the foundations of a solid belief, we shall be, at the same time, showing the way to get rid of uncertainty.

Dealing with Doubt.

But it is necessary to dig down and clear away before we begin to lay the stones of our building. So let us give a thought to the first steps from doubt to faith, the way to deal with doubt at the outset. Three simple things are to be said here.

First, face your doubts squarely ; look them in the face

I believe most of those who are unsettled need this advice. They tend to hide their doubt away, and try not to think of it. But that is the worst possible thing to do with it. It may be wrong sometimes to doubt ; but it is certainly wrong to keep your doubt always in the dark because you are afraid to look at it. It may be hard to face some questions ; it certainly is hard and wearing and insecure to dodge and avoid these questions because they are troublesome. It is true that ugly things show just as they are in the light, but it is just as true that they are worse in the dark, because they do *not* show what they are. To try to get rid of doubt by hiding it away, is like trying to get rid of sorrow, or of hunger, by not thinking of it. This may do for a while, but sooner or later the feeling comes back again, with redoubled energy.

Tennyson gives an inspiring thought in the stanzas which follow the one quoted a few pages back :

Faith Building.

“I know not.—One at least I knew,
In many a subtle question versed,
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,
But ever strove to make it true.
Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.
He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind,
And laid them ; thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.”

Yes, there is a faith in honest doubt, a faith that will some time lead to God if it be followed. But it must be honest doubt, manfully met, fought and struggled with as an enemy ; not kept in secret and enjoyed ; not kept to indulge as an intellectual dissipation ; not avoided or locked up for fear of facing it ; but met as the manly man always meets hard facts and hard questions, with strength, and courage, and honesty. Do not try to deceive yourself into faith. Face your doubt, and see just what it is.

A second step towards faith is a desire to believe. Perhaps you cannot have a true, strong faith. But *do you want* to have it? That is one of the first things. *Would you like* to believe strongly and truly? Would

Dealing with Doubt.

you like to have a positive faith and a working realization of the unseen and eternal? If you do want this, there is the greatest hope and help for you. For intellectual and spiritual faith is one of those things of which the promise is sure, "Ask and ye shall receive." The man who really wants it will get it, if he wants it enough to work and wait. Think what faith is, what it has done, what it can do. What a power it is! What a security it brings! What happiness it secures! Do you not want it?

The third step towards the beginning of a true faith is that you bring your very unbelief to God, if you can. You know there is some great Power without you. Bring your mental or spiritual doubt to him. Do not try to pray to him as a man of faith ought to pray. If you do not believe this or that about God, it is not right to pray to him as if you did believe it. If you do not feel him as a Reality, as a Friend, it is wrong to pray to him as if you did, because you think that you ought to feel in that way; but come to him honestly. Bring your mental doubts to him and your spiritual coldness. Cry to him, "O God, I do not believe this or that part of what men tell me is the truth; I am not sure of thy presence, not sure of thy love, not sure of thy response to me; I do not

Faith Building.

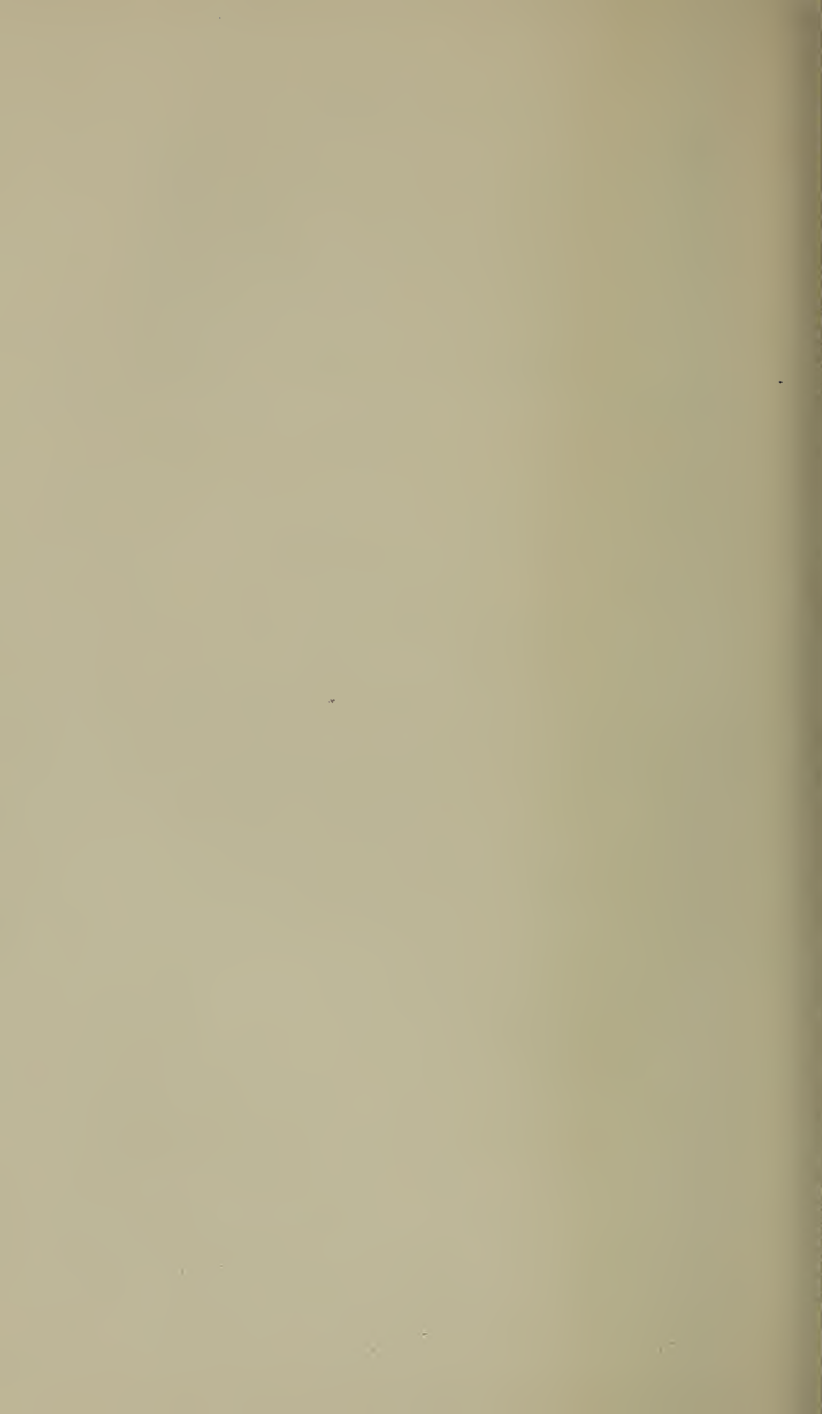
feel that thou art real to me as earthly things are. But, O God, I want to know these things and to feel in this way. I bring my unbelief to thee ; help me, O God." Do you remember the prayer of the man who had gotten down into the depths of doubt, "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul?" Even that prayer is better than trying to pray as one ought to if he had a full faith.

" This is my creed ;
This be my deed :
Faith, or a doubt,
I shall speak out,
And hide not my heart."

Be honest with yourself, with your doubt, with God. That is the prerequisite to any true and real faith, mental or spiritual. If you thus face your doubts, you will be walking towards a true, real and secure faith. Stand up to your questionings and uncertainties, find out what they really are, earnestly want to get rid of them, and then bring them to God with a cry for help, and you will be helped, slowly but surely, out of the darkness into his marvelous light. Faith and unfaith may be struggling together in you. Do not bring the one to God and hide the other away. Bring them both. Cry, "Lord,

Dealing with Doubt.

I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.” Then even though you have gone so short a way towards the true faith, into your darkness will come a little ray of that light from God that shines for the just man, the honest man, and makes his path like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.



II.

THE ONE FOUNDATION.

NOT long ago I passed a place where men had dug down deep in preparation for putting up a large building. But they did not begin work at once when they had reached the required depth. They first drove great piles into the ground, till they had filled up the space with them. Then sometime after, as I went by, they were placing in position the masses of steel and stone; and the building was rising, slowly but firmly, because there was something below that would hold. That is what we want in our faith, something beneath that will hold. What one fact are we to place at the bottom of our religious thinking and feeling on which to base a true faith? The famous French philosopher started with one fact of consciousness, and on that he constructed a rational philosophy of the universe. If there is one fact we can find, not a mere theory, but something we accept just because "we know not something which is fact as much," then

Faith Building.

we have a firm foundation for belief. Is there such a foundation for Christian faith? Yes; we find it in the Person and Character of Jesus of Nazareth. There is the one fact upon which all true Christian faith rests.

It may at first be disappointing to those who are eagerly wanting to find something for faith to rest upon, to be told that that something is found in the character of Jesus as given in the gospels. You may answer me, "You are calling for faith in that basis which you lay. Here am I, trying to find a starting-point for believing something, and you call upon me to believe in two things at the very outset: in Jesus Christ and in the gospels. Of course, if I could have faith in them, I would have a sound Christian belief. But it is not fair to make me accept them at the start, when what I am seeking is the way whereby I can come to accept them at the end."

But natural as this objection may seem, it will disappear when you understand what it is that I am really urging. When I say that you can find the one fact upon which Christian faith may rest in the Character and Person of Jesus of Nazareth, I am not asking you to believe that he was divine; I am not asking that you should believe anything at all about him. Still less am I demanding

The One Foundation.

that you should accept the gospels as inspired. I am not urging you to believe anything at all about him or about the books that present him to you. I am merely asking you to look at him just as he was and ask yourself what his life means. It is not faith I am calling for ; it is the simple consideration of a fact.

It is a simple matter of history that there was a man once in Syria, whose name was Jesus of Nazareth. All that after-ages have made of him, all the books that have been written, and the creeds that have been formed and the thoughts that have been developed about him, his Person and his work, cannot alter that fact in the least particle. It is a mere matter of history that Jesus lived and died there in Palestine many years ago. It does not take any faith to see that ; you cannot help seeing it. Actually there was a man once of that name who lived the same kind of life that I live. He knew hunger and want, sorrow and joy, disappointment and anticipation, peace and trouble, success and failure, as I know them. He ate and drank and talked and worked as I do, as my neighbor does, as every son of man has to do. Can we not realize that fact ?

But simple matter of fact that it is, we find

Faith Building.

it hard to realize, though we cannot help seeing, that it is true. The thoughts of men about that life of Jesus have been such as tend to take it away from the sphere in which your life and mine are lived and thus to impart an unreality to it. There was once a saw-mill that was placed on the top of a very steep hill. It caught the breeze magnificently, but they could not get the logs up to it to be trimmed. We often elevate religion till men cannot get at it. The church has sometimes lifted up Jesus in such a way as to put him out of men's reach. If we could only pick up the gospels and read them as new! If we had never heard of Jesus, and suddenly this account of his life appeared, how it would appeal to us, how we would read and reread the book and wonder at the beauty and charm of its story. Now we want to do something of that kind for ourselves by taking up the gospels simply as a record of a life that a man actually lived. Think what you may about the wonderful parts of the gospel story; leave them out for a while and simply read the life of Jesus of Nazareth. For whatever may be true or false about him, whatever may be doubtful or mystical, this is certain: there was such a man as Jesus, and he lived, and loved, and died, as all men do.

The One Foundation.

Another fact: He made a great impression upon his friends. They loved him passionately, they looked up to him, they followed him with eager devotion. After death had taken him from them, they still loved him and his thoughts and messages, and they went about telling others of the Teacher they loved. One of those who had been with him, made a collection of his sayings, which was afterwards made into a book; another, his most intimate friend, told his own thoughts about "the Master," as they loved to call him; told them with loving insight and mystic tenderness. Two others, who had not known him personally, found out what they could from those who had seen him and then drew up narratives of his life based on what his friends thought about him and said of him. And thus it came to pass that four little pamphlets have come to us which tell of the life of that man Jesus who made our era. They are all of them incomplete, these four little booklets; they are fragmentary, there is much in one which is in another. They do not profess to give his life logically or perfectly; they simply give some facts about him and some thoughts which he spoke and taught. That is all; and yet they give a wonderfully satisfactory view of him. I do not believe there

Faith Building.

has ever been a biography written which, for excellence of portraiture alone, could compare with these four little books; nor do I believe there is a more striking and individual character brought out anywhere in history or fiction than the character of Jesus as given by these four men. For they simply wrote what they had seen and what they knew without trying to arrange it methodically or to secure literary effect.

Now all this of which we have been speaking does not take any faith at all. It merely takes the ability to see a fact of history; and any one can do that. These are simple matters of actual happening. There are the books, and in them is the picture of the man. Both are real. Whatever doubts you may have about this or that point in the creed, whatever you may think about the divine nature of Christ, or about anything else, these cannot keep you from acknowledging that the man Jesus did live, and that in these books we have the picture of him drawn by his friends. Does it take any faith for you to read the Life of Lincoln as told by his secretaries? Not a bit. You merely say, there was such a man, and this book is founded on facts, substantially, at any rate. Now that is what I ask you to do with this life and these books. Take these four little volumes

The One Foundation.

and read them in that way. Get some sympathetic life of Jesus, such as "Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth," and read it through, so that it may give you a fresh idea of the human life that was lived there. Take Matthew and Luke and read them through, trying to realize that it is the life of an actual man you are reading, and not a theological treatise. In this way come to know the historic person, the man who really lived. He certainly was a great man; and it is worth your while to know his life for that reason, even if you never see in him anything more than a great man.

Now if you will do this (and it is the way, I believe, to start a true Christian faith), if you will thus read the life of Jesus, and get to know it, you will find much, I cannot tell just what. Every one of us finds something new in the life of Jesus. But just as sure as the daylight comes with the sunrise, so sure will be your finding of one fact, if you read the life of Jesus of Nazareth. You may leave out what you will that is told about him; you may refuse to believe the wonderful parts of his story if you will; you may keep only the barest facts that are told, the things you cannot help taking for true; yet you will come out from your reading and study with this at any rate, this that every reader of the

Faith Building.

gospels finds, this that no one has ever denied, however much he may have wanted to, this that is so much matter of fact that it cannot be denied, that we find in him the most perfect life that ever has been lived.

What do we mean by that? I mean that we find in Jesus as his life is set forth in the gospel story the highest ideal, most fully realized.

We find in him the highest ideal. Take his words and look at the ideal of life and character that is in them. What a lofty one! How it towers above all that men had thought or seen before! How it towers above all that men have thought and taught since! The bitterest opponents of Christianity always take pains to say that they do not attack Christ, that they have only reverence for his life and ideals. The worst enemies of the church revere the man of Galilee. Take that ideal of holiness, of purity, of love, of sacrifice, of truthfulness, of independence, and see where you can find one to match it. Other men have taught great things, only to have their disciples go further; no disciple has ever gone beyond Jesus. How poor all other ideals beside his! Plato was a lofty mind; yet there is much that is savage about his ideals when placed side by side with those of Jesus. He thought, for example,

The One Foundation.

that the ideal State would kill off the sickly children.

See what has come out of that ideal of life which came in with Jesus. Every good movement among the civilized nations, their very civilization, all that was good in chivalry, in the church, in the Protestant movement, in the care for the helpless, in the growth of the spirit of humanity, all these have come from the ideal which Jesus had. And apart from the thought of its results, what a high ideal it was in itself! Compare your principles with those of Jesus. The nineteenth century is one of great thought and high achievement; yet how do your ideals compare with those of this simple peasant-teacher of the first century?

But we find in Jesus also the fullest realization of the ideal the world has ever seen. How seldom do we find a man who can both see truly and act as he sees! The poet writes "A man's a man for a' that," and then eats his heart out because the rich do not flatter him enough. The great thinker of our time inveighs against writing for money and then leaves a fortune behind him. So it often goes; the men of ideals are not always, not often, the men of real attainment. But in Jesus we find not only the clearest and highest ideal, we find also the most perfect reali-

Faith Building.

zation of it. He not only taught; he showed what character should be. His life was so transparent that men could see it through and through, and it was all clear and beautiful. What a wonderful thing, that he could carry out so perfectly what he saw so accurately. The greatest man of Greece, Socrates, the man of high aims and great achievement, when the painter represented him with evil passion showing in his face, said, "Let it be; you have painted Socrates as he is." We admire him for that touch of humility; but Jesus could not say such a thing as that. The very humble confession of sin and weakness and imperfection which in other men is a glory and a crown to their character, we instinctively feel in him would be a blemish. That life which saw the ideal truth as no one else ever did, also lived out that ideal truth as no one else ever did. And thus it was the most perfect life; for perfect living is simply true thought faithfully translated into action.

Still we are talking about facts, that are so evident that you cannot help seeing that they are true. This man Jesus lived. These books tell about him, and they show that he was the most perfect life that ever lived. These facts bring to you a question for solution. They ask of you with insistence,

The One Foundation.

What are you going to do with that Person, that Character? How are you going to explain him? It is not a piece of fiction, which you can admire and then let go as a dream of some wise and tender writer. It is a life that was lived as yours is, and mine. A man literally lived a life that was exactly like yours and mine, except that it was ideal in its thinking and acting, whereas you and I stumble along. There it is, a part of the life of this world. The whole world stands waiting for you to explain it. Your heart and mind cry out for something to make less dark to you all this that lies around you, this mystery of life and death and love and sorrow. And in the very centre of it all stands this character of Jesus of Nazareth, and asks, "What will you do with Jesus which is called Christ?" Answer that question, and you will find a Christian faith beginning or begun.

How will you account for his having this high ideal? Whence did he get it? How different, utterly, from anything in his own time or before him. The wisest men of his day could not have given it to him, if he could have talked with them all. And he did not know a single one of the wise men of his day. He never read a book except the old Hebrew documents. He never had any

Faith Building.

teacher but his own thoughts ; he had no education, no advantages. The sneering query of the Pharisees, " How hath this man knowledge of letters having never learned ? " is a question we may ask in all seriousness, for it presents a problem that demands solution. How did that man, how *could* that man, brought up in the shop of a carpenter, get hold of the only perfect ideal the world has ever known, that which the greatest thinkers and poets and philosophers of the world had been striving for in vain ? Where did it come from ? You with all the centuries of training back of you have still lower ideals than he had. How did he have the perfect ideal, with nothing in the past to construct it from ? What is your answer to that question ?

And how was he able to realize it ? Whence did he get the power to live up to his high ideal ? How could he succeed where other men fail ? How often we excuse a man for failure to reach a high ideal, because he had so little early training. Think of the environment of Jesus and then say how it happened that he always lived up to his ideal. What are you going to say of that life, what are you going to do with it ? It stands and calls upon you to explain it. It is not a doctrine, or a theory, or a bit of fiction. It is an actual

The One Foundation.

man's life, lived here on this earth, lived amid the surroundings that hem in your life and mine ; you cannot deny it ; it is a mere matter of fact in history. What will you do with it ?

Two men whom I knew very well were once talking together. One of them was a decided Christian, the other was a pronounced unbeliever. The latter was saying, as he often did, that religion was a mere theory with nothing to rest upon ; that Christians only deluded themselves into believing they believed. The other answered, " But what do you do with Christ ? " The unbeliever replied at once that that was easy enough to account for ; men have to, or think they have to, worship something, and so it was easy for them to take the character of Jesus of Nazareth, and build stories of miraculous occurrences about it, and so lift it up into a divine image to worship. His friend answered, " But how do you account for Jesus of Nazareth ? " After a long pause, the other said, in a low voice, " I can't account for him. "

For any one who really faces the facts of the life of Jesus there is only one answer that meets the facts squarely. Either Jesus Christ was God-sent to be our leader, or else there is no such thing as God or goodness.

Faith Building.

You may call him divine or human, you may believe this, or deny that about him ; but this you must see, if you accept the facts : If there is any goodness in that which is good, any truth in the world at all, then Jesus was a true leader of men in their search for God. No other answer is possible.

Unless this life is all a hideous dream, unless chance rules all things, and the world has misshapen itself by brute force and blind luck, unless goodness and truth and beauty are only things we have invented to delude ourselves with, then Jesus was either a man whom God taught or he was God himself. If you believe in progress at all, if you feel that goodness and purity and nobility, and all for which men have been reaching out are the most real of things, then what are you going to say of the great force in that progress, the best, the purest, the noblest that the world has seen in the way of living ? Fairbairn puts it strongly enough to be true : " The wonderful thing in the story is, that what in the abstract would seem impossible romance is in reality the most sober fact ; while out of the story, when viewed in relation to the course of human development, rises for philosophy the problem, Can he, so mean in life, so illustrious in history, stand where he does by chance ? "

The One Foundation.

The facts say to you, Either Jesus of Nazareth was a man to whom God gave his truth and his Spirit for the help of all men, or else he was divine. Either of these positions is enough to base a Christian faith upon. Suppose you take the first. Suppose you say, Jesus was a man like myself, to whom God gave his truth as he did not to others, and who through the help of the Spirit of God lived a perfect life. Then how strongly does the lesson come to you, If he, a man, lived that kind of life, you, a man like him, can live that kind of life too. He is a worthy teacher and leader. You can rest upon his words and his life; they show what life is, and what truth is.

“Christ, some one says, was human as we are;
No judge eyes us from heaven, our sin to scan.
Was Christ a man like us? Ah, let us try
If we, then, too can be such men as he.”

If you take the other possible answer, and say, He was divine, then all the more worthy is he of your following him. If he was God, and came here and lived a human life, then it shows the dignity of human life in the sight of God, it shows the wish God has that we might live nobly and truly, it shows that a divine ideal and divine power are ours to use in living as Christ did. Whichever

Faith Building.

answer you give, whether you say, He was a man, or, He was God, in either case you have a firm fact for faith to found itself upon. If he was a man like you, you can be a man like him. If he was God, then you can follow him and find help in him.

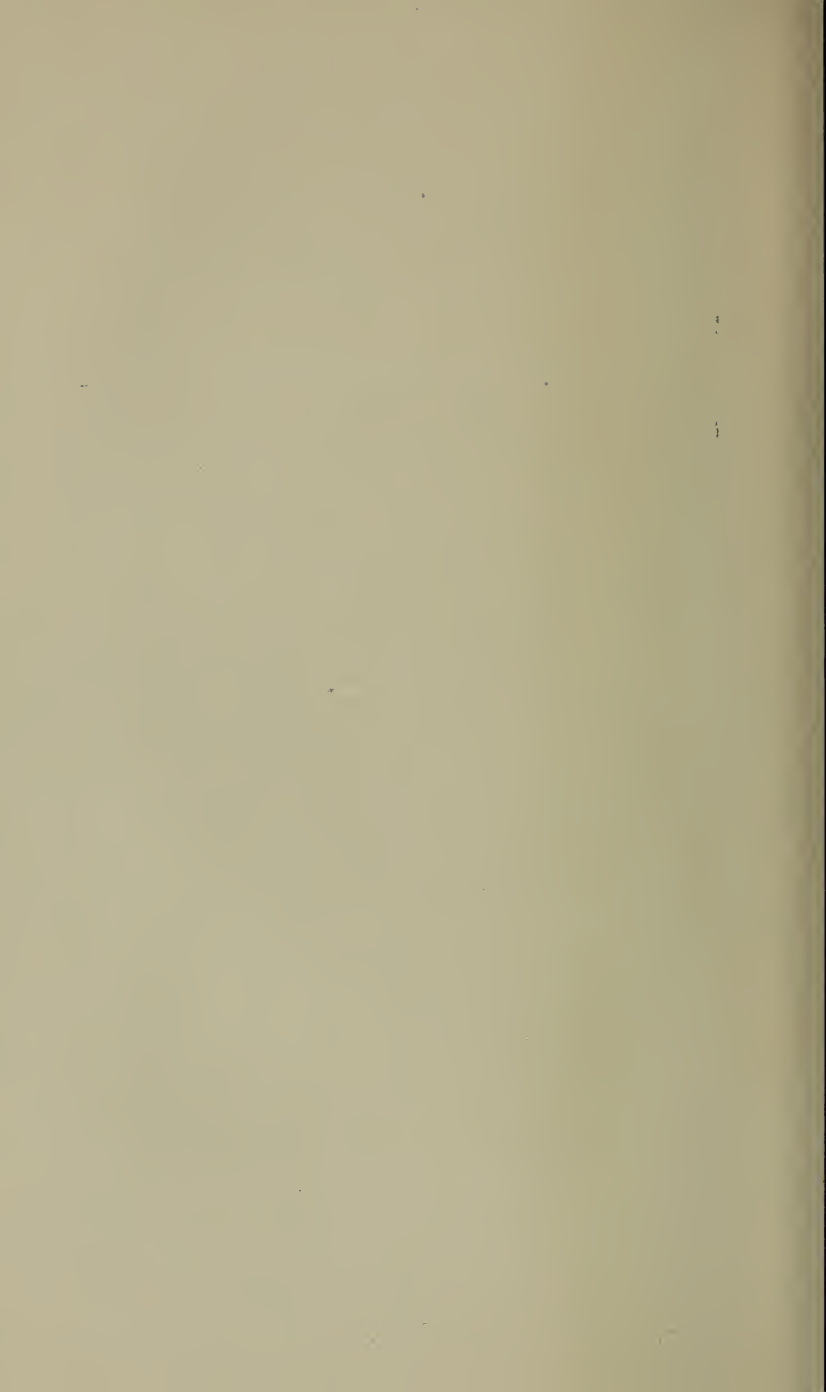
Here then is the one fact upon which a true, sound Christian faith can rest. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is, Christ Jesus." There stands the life. It is there as a matter of literary and historical record. What are you to do with it? How are you to explain it? It is a sober fact that he lived, that he had that ideal, that he realized it. Was he mistaken in his ideal? Then the whole world is wrong, and we cannot believe in anything, and all our faith in love and beauty and goodness and truth is but a child's belief in fairy tales. Was he right in that ideal? Then I can trust him to tell me the truth, and can trust his words and life to show me the true ideal. How did he get the power to live such a life? Was he a man with powers and capacities like mine? Then God must have helped him and he can help me the same way. Was he divine? Then all the more can and will he help me. If you can only once be brought face to face with Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of the gospels, so that you will see and know his life for your-

The One Foundation.

self, your faith will be started on the path which leads without fail to God and his eternal truth. Take Jesus, and account for him, and you have a basis for faith. And the more you try to realize that he was a man, the surer you will be that God was with and in him. The foundation of faith is in Jesus, the Man of Nazareth. I take that life and lay it as a foundation-stone, as one fact which I know, which I cannot deny if I would. And that fact makes him my leader. Not that I yet believe that he is divine. Not that I believe anything about it, at the start. I simply take the facts about him, and I say, they cannot mean anything else than that he is a true Leader; and whatever he be, I will follow him.

“If Jesus Christ is a man—and only a man—I say
That of all mankind I will cleave to him, and
to him will I cleave alway;
If Jesus Christ is a God—and the only God—
I swear,
I will follow him through heaven and hell, the
earth, the sea, and the air.”

What we need is to get back to the simple reading of the gospels, and the simple sight of the character of Jesus. We need to know more of Jesus of Nazareth, who went about doing good, because God was with him. Then we shall have a rock on which to build a faith that shall be strong and beautiful and effective.



III.

THE ONE TRUTH.

WE have laid the foundation, but the whole purpose of the foundation is that more may be built upon it. What shall we build on the one fact we have found as a basis for faith? If Christ is my Leader in the search for truth, what does he teach me? He has much to say, many rules to give, many words for his follower to learn and obey. We cannot take up many of them. If we can get hold of one or two great, fundamental thoughts in the teaching of Jesus, we shall have enough for faith to start with.

There are two parts of life in which we especially need a Teacher. We need to know the one thing to believe, and the one thing to do; the one truth, and the one duty. The main part of Kant's philosophy grew out of the two simple questions, What can I know? and, What ought I to do? Does Jesus answer these questions?

Jesus does give us *one fundamental truth to be believed*. There can be no doubt as to what it is. Take ten unprejudiced men, of

Faith Building.

any race or creed, or of no creed at all, and let them, after reading the four books of the life of Jesus, say what is the underlying idea in the mind of that teacher, and they would all agree. The one thing which was sure to Jesus, upon which his life and teaching rested, was the truth of the Fatherhood of God.

That was the distinguishing mark of his teaching. Men had heard much about the Creator. Especially had the Jews heard the story of creation in so clear a way that they could not fail to know what their religion taught about it. They had had revealed to them the thought of the Providence of God, and that so clearly and strongly that the old Jews had a better conception of the presence of God in nature and daily life than many Christians of this day. But Jesus came to show to men, as it never had been dreamed of before, that God was their Father. Some of the Jews had seen that God had a Father's pity for those who feared him; but the thought of the Fatherhood of God, as the relation he sustained towards all men, had never been brought into religious thought till Jesus came and taught it; and through the teaching of it, he made religion a different force from that which it had been,

Every part, every stage of the revelation

The One Truth.

in the Bible had its own name for God. Abraham knew him as the Almighty ; Moses as Jehovah ; David as the Lord of Hosts. And then Jesus came with the new name of Father ; and just as each name of God denoted a conception of God which influenced the character of the men who held it, so when Jesus brought in the name " Father," it introduced a religion of love, for God is love, and we cannot worship God unless we serve Love.

The thought of Fatherhood which Jesus introduced is more than the looking on God as the Father because he has created us. He is our Father, as Jesus thinks of it, not merely because he has made us, but because he has made us in his image, because he is essentially like us, we essentially like him. We are his children far more than the birds are. Jesus showed us how the Great Creator cared for everything he had made, so that not one bird could fall without the notice and care of the Father ; and then he asked, significantly, " Are ye not much better than they ? " God cares more for men than for birds. Birds are his creatures, and therefore he cares for them ; men are his children, and therefore he loves them. Fatherhood implies kinship of nature, not merely creatorship. The watchmaker is not the father

Faith Building.

of the watch, though he is its maker. It is only by a figurative use of the term that we speak of an inventor as the father of his invention. But God is our Father in no figurative sense; his Fatherhood means similarity of nature, communion of nature, personal love on his part towards us, the possibility of personal love on our part towards him.

Jesus explained his own life in terms of this one great idea. To him all life was doing the Father's will; all necessary waiting was waiting for the Father's time. He was God's Son. And if you read his words attentively, I think you will see what seems very plain to me as I read them, that Jesus called himself the Son of God not only through his divine nature, but through his human nature as well. He was Son of God because he was Son of man. Man is God's son, and therefore the noblest and highest type of man would be most truly God's Son. Such seems often to be his thought.

It is through this truth of the Fatherhood of God that he explains not his own life alone, but the whole life of man on the earth. God is the Father of all. He sends the sun to shine on the evil and the good alike; he sends rain on the just and the unjust. Men can find no higher motive for

The One Truth.

love towards all men than the action and spirit of the Great Father towards all men, for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Why? Because they are his children. A ruler may let an evil subject go, may be content to punish him. But a father can never let a child go. And God never loses hold of a soul. That is what Jesus made the basis for prayer. "When ye pray, say Father." That is the foundation of the most beautiful of his parables. There are few parts of the gospel that have brought more men and women back to God than that story of the Prodigal Son; and it is not only because it shows our sinful life so wonderfully; it is also and more truly because it shows the love of God the Father, as no one ever has seen it except the teacher God has sent. This thought of God's essential Fatherhood is the central thought of those wonderful words of Jesus in the last few chapters of the gospel according to John. Almost every other sentence has something about the Father, about his love, about how Jesus was going back to him. Thus from the first sermon in Galilee to the last discourse in Jerusalem, the keynote of the thought and teaching of Jesus is this one great truth of God's Fatherhood. Yes, it goes further than that. For the first word of Jesus is that one speech

Faith Building.

that has come to us from his boyhood, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And his last word upon the cross was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." His first word was, "I have come to work for my Father." His last word was, "I am going to live with my Father," and just as a movement in a symphony will pass through many modes and keys with rich beauties that seem strange and almost foreign to the one who hears it for the first time, and yet through it all the one note is underneath, and at the last all is again in the key with which it started, so the life of Jesus is keyed to that one note of the Fatherhood of God; it is that which gives harmony to the whole life, unity to the whole teaching. Take that away, and all would go; leave us that, and the rest will grow from it.

But Jesus did something more for us than to teach this great truth; he proved it to us also. To make a truth real to a man something more is necessary than to put it into words. It must be put into life. Jesus showed to men the truth of the Fatherhood of God. He made an appeal to their own nature, to show them what the nature of God is. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how

The One Truth.

much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him." In that sentence we find a proof of God's relation to men made by an appeal to man's nature. This beautiful Father's instinct in you, can you account for it in any way except that it came from God himself? And that means that God must have the richest and fullest amount of that feeling.

But most of all Jesus proved the truth of the doctrine he taught, by living all his life through on the basis of that truth. It is a great thing to teach what is true so that men can see it. It is far greater to live it so that men cannot help seeing it. Teach a truth never so great and powerful, and, if you simply teach it, men will say, "It is a fine theory," but teach it and live it, and men will say, "It is a good theory, *and it will work.*" And this belief in the Fatherhood of God, this belief as to the power who sends me my every day's experience, from whom comes sorrow and joy, success and failure, sunshine and shadow, life and death, that he is perfect love, and that where I cannot see his working, where all is mystery, even there love is working, and only love, and that some day I shall see,—this great truth Jesus believed, and by it he lived his man's life, making of it an absolutely trust-

Faith Building.

ful life. And he lived it in the face of all that makes life hard to us, all that makes us doubt the love and Fatherhood of God, sometimes sadly, sometimes fiercely.

Every heart naturally wants to believe that God is love; but there seem facts in life which we cannot reconcile with that belief. Well, these facts were in the life of Jesus as they never have been in yours; and yet he never doubted the love of the Father for a moment. We read Emerson's essays with their calm serene view of life, and we feel it was well enough for him to view life that way, in his quiet and dreamy home; if he had been out in the bustle of daily business as I am, he might have taken a different strain. And so we think and say of many a teacher in the school of life. But when we come to Jesus the Christ we are silent. For he lived in the hardest of our conditions; and yet his song was ever of the love of God, and the peace of God, and the kindness and goodness of the Father who arranges it all. What is there in your life that makes it hard to think of God as the loving Father which did not come to him tenfold? You say, "I cannot believe God is the Father when I see so much evil in the world." But did Jesus see sin with less clear vision than you do? Did he

The One Truth.

shrink from it less than you do? And yet, though every sight of sin was a wound to the sensitive soul of the sinless man, he never doubted the Fatherly love of God because of the sin of man. He saw that just because God was man's Father, and not merely his Creator, there must be the possibility of man's sinning. Man would not be a true child unless he were free to love his Father. He could not be free to love him unless he were free *not* to love him, and in that freedom not to love lies the possibility of sin. In that fact of God's Fatherhood lies also the reason for the continuance of sin. If man were merely an instrument of God, God might crush him and his sin, and so stop it. But just because God is a Father, and man his son, God suffers when man sins, and bears with him, and pleads with him, and so the evil continues, but only that God may struggle with it, and finally save man from it. Jesus saw the fact of evil, as you cannot see it, with awful vividness. And yet he never doubted the Fatherhood of God.

Sometimes it is the fact of the farness of God from our nature that makes us doubt his love and Fatherhood. We cannot find him; we seem to pray into a great void, that sends no answer back, unless a hollow echo.

Faith Building.

We think, if God were my Father, would he not make himself known to me? And yet Jesus believed that God was the Father, though he passed through that same valley of uncertainty, of feeling that God was far from him, through which you have passed. When he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" he felt, what every man feels at some time, the distance between himself and God. And yet even then he knew that God was his Father, and, spite of the distance, he said a moment after, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Or is it trial, the sorrow of life, that makes it hard for you to believe in the Fatherhood and love of God? I believe that this has more weight than the other facts of which we have been speaking. "How can God be my Father, how can he love me, and let such trials come to me? How can he love me and send such experiences into my life?" That was Job's cry, and that is the cry of many a heart that wants to rest in God's care and cannot. But look at the life of Jesus. He was the man of sorrows. He knew disappointment as you never can know it. He knew failure as you can hardly imagine it. He knew the grief of personal loss and loneliness as few men have felt it; every sorrow

The One Truth.

that comes to a human heart came to his human heart ; and yet in and through it all he said with unfaltering voice, God is love ; the Father is ruling and all must be well. He prayed to have the cup pass from him. He prayed to have the hour go by without his bearing the agony that came with it, and yet when God let the hour come, when the cup was put to his lips, he drank it, and said, God is love.

The life of Jesus forever proves the truth his words teach. When he tells us that God is the Father ; that the One who sends us our life, every part of it, is One who loves us, and loves most tenderly, when, to our poor sight, He seems to be wounding us most painfully ; when he tells us that, it is not the word of one who does not know, it is the word of One who suffered being tried, who bore the same sorrows that break the hearts of men and women, the words of a man who died of a broken heart, the words of our brother, who lived our life, and therefore we can take them as true and good words ; the greatest teacher God has sent, in the face of the hardest experience man has lived, taught without wavering or doubting, that God is man's Father, and all his works are done in love—cannot we believe it ?

If only we do believe this one truth, what-

Faith Building.

ever else we may not believe just now, we shall have a firm basis upon which faith and life may rest. Here is the first stone to lay on the foundation. We come to Jesus to be taught, and the first thing he teaches is this lesson of the absolute love of God. Learn that and you have something by which to hold, whatever comes. Learn that, and little by little the Spirit will guide you into all the truth which came with Jesus. It is the one truth in which belief is necessary for any true Christian thinking or living. It lights up life and death with the glory of the eternal, the glory which shines around the life of Jesus. The one who is sure of the love of God, the Father, finds the secret which Isaiah found in the midst of his stormy and painful life: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."*

*I am indebted largely to Fairbairn's *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* for what is said above about the Fatherhood of God.

IV.

THE ONE DUTY.

WHAT answer does Jesus give to the question, What ought I to do? Does he give us one comprehensive statement of duty, as he gave one fundamental truth? Yes, there is one seed-thought of action, as there was one seed-thought of faith, which, if received into an honest and good heart, will grow into a guide for the whole life. What is it? The all-important duty is *to do the will of God*.

What does Jesus teach us about this one thing to do? He shows us the importance of it.

All through his words there stands out this as the one thing his followers must do. So important is it that he makes it the condition of entering his kingdom: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Then he went on to say that the one who did the will of God was like one who built upon the rock, while the one who merely heard and did not obey was like the

Faith Building.

builder who, without a foundation, built a house upon the sand. It is very clear from these words that he thought of doing God's will as something without which a true life could neither start nor go on.

But even more clear is the evidence to the importance of this duty which comes from the life of Jesus. James Russell Lowell has well said that words count for little, but that "when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice," then it is evident that the truth, whatever it be, has taken hold upon him. We can see what this idea of doing God's will as the one great end of life meant to Christ, by seeing how fully he made to it the gift of his daily life and practice.

The basis of all his action was his endeavor to do the will of God. There were many times when he would wait, though it seemed to others that he ought to work; disciples would urge him on; many would fall away from him through impatience over his slowness of working; his great forerunner, who had pointed him out to the first disciples, might send to ask if he were really the Messiah. Men might urge him, and wonder at his slow way of working. There was just one answer, "Mine hour is not yet come." And that meant that the Father was not ready for that work yet, and therefore he

The One Duty.

would wait till the will of God was clear. And then when once the will of the Father was clear to him, what could stop or hinder him? Herod sent to tell him to leave his dominions or he would kill him; with sublime indifference he sent back the word that he would preach still some days in those parts, and then would go to Jerusalem. When the great men of the nation opposed him he went calmly on in the way that was open to him, as if there were no one in the way. He would wait patiently for the will of God; and once that was clear, he would wait for nothing else, but would go in the way of that will, though it were the way that led through Gethsemane and to the hill of the cross.

His whole satisfaction was in finding out the will of God, and then doing it with his might. Do you remember when once the disciples pressed him to eat something, how he answered, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of;" and when they wondered what he meant, how he said again, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." What a light that sheds on the importance which Jesus gave to this matter of doing the will of God. He made it the one thing in his life; and thus he taught it more plainly than words could

Faith Building.

bring it out, as the rule for the life of all his followers. There is just one thing for the Christian to do, one simple, sublime, difficult thing; and that is, the will of God; other duties grow out of that as the tree out of the germ.

But there is another question that goes with this one, of what we are to do. It is, how are we to do it? It is not always easy for one to know what is the will of God. How can we know it? In the old days if we are to believe the Scripture narrative, God spoke to men, sent angels to tell them what to do, revealed himself in dreams to them. Such messages do not come to us. It is well enough to say that our one duty is to do God's will, but we cannot do it till we know it, and the practical difficulty is to find out what it is. Now one of the most helpful things about the teaching of Jesus on this point is that he not only shows us the importance of doing the will of God; he also shows us something of what doing God's will means.

Looking at the life of Jesus, we find that doing God's will means taking the principles God gives us as our rules.

I do not suppose there is a man or a woman who would not acknowledge that there are some things which God reveals as

The One Duty.

the right principles. You may find them in one place and I in another, but each of us is sure of some things that come from God as principles of right living. Some of us come to the Bible and take the thoughts that we find there as the principles which God has given to be the guide for true human life. Perhaps some of you do not feel that you can take the Bible as your guide. You may not feel sure that it is the Word of God. Well, even so, there are some things you know are right and others which you know are wrong. Your conscience, though it may be a poor guide, is yet a true one so far as it goes, true enough to show you, so that you believe it, that some things are right and others wrong. Now you know that the will of God is that you should do those right things, and not do the wrong things, that the principles which you know to be good should be your guides.

But doing the will of God is vastly more than accepting as true the principles which you find in the Bible and in your conscience. It is not enough for you to say, I ought to be true, I ought to be pure, I ought to be honest, I ought to be Christ-like. If you are to do God's will for you, you must ask and answer the question, in what special place and way does God want me to be true, and pure, and

Faith Building.

honest and Christ-like? Where will you find the answer to that? There is just one place where you find God's will for you, and that is, in the ordering of your life. There is a part of your life and its surroundings which is your own. You can change it; you are responsible for it. But there is a part of it for which you are not responsible, which you cannot change. Each thing of that kind, each part of your life which is out of your own control, each circumstance, help, hindrance, open door, closed way, difficulty, inspiration, comes from God; it is all his will for you. Our life, not of course as we fashion it, but as we receive it from the hand of God, is a revelation to us of the will of God. It comes from him, does it not?

This does not mean that we should meekly fall in with what comes to us, that, if we begin a good work, and find things in the way, we should at once give it up and say, "My life does not work that way, and, therefore, it is not the will of God that I should do this or that." The man who starts to be absolutely honest and high-minded in business, and comes to a place where honesty and high-mindedness will mean more or less of failure, and the opposite action will mean sure success, has no right to say, "The will of God is that I should not be thus honest

The One Duty.

and high-minded." If he says that, he is not *doing* the will of God, he is *shirking* it. God sends us our life, but he sends us some things to fight as well as some to welcome; some things that tend to make us fail as well as some that tend to make us succeed.

There are two ways in which God reveals his will to you, and you must find it through both of them together. The principles by which you ought to live are in the Bible as your conscience appropriates it; the sphere in which you are to work them out is in your daily life as God sends it to you. Take the principles and live by them in the circumstances God sends; and remember that both are God's will for you; that his will is that you should do the one in the midst of the other. Compass and chart are the important things for the safety of a vessel. But the captain must use them in view of the things that are round about his ship. He must take note of storm and wind and of the condition of his boat, if he is to bring her in safely. The man who sees God's will merely in his life and circumstances, is a captain without chart or compass. The man who sees God's will only in the Bible is a captain who studies his chart but does not mind wind and wave, cloud or sun, who goes on regardless alike of the con-

Faith Building.

ditions and needs of his craft. Neither one is wise.

The God who sent you the Bible, who has given you your conscience, is the same One who sends you your every-day life. Your way, my way, the true way for every man and woman to carry out the will of God, is to carry out the principles in the midst of the circumstances. Both come from God. The one is as much his will as the other.

We are so apt to forget that the God who gave us the Bible is the God who gives us our life; that the Spirit who gave the apostles and prophets each thought in this book, is one with the Father who plans each day for each man. Have you never had such a feeling as this: I cannot do the will of God as I would, because of this thing or that in my life? How many a weary, hard-worked, sorrow-burdened soul, has longed for a time when it could do the will of God, saying, "I cannot do God's will now, because my life forbids." But who arranged that life? Who put you where you are? If God has done it, then that life of yours is as much God's will for you as this Bible is, as much his will for you as preaching the gospel would be, if he sent you the chance to do that. If God sends difficulties it is because his will for you is that you should fight; if God sends trials,

The One Duty.

it is because his will for you is that you should bear and endure; if God sends the conditions of success to you it is because his will for you is that you should be successful and happy. It is better to be happy than to be sorrowful; but sorrow that comes through the will of God is better than happiness that comes in any other way. Get hold of the principles and ideals which God has given to guide the life of men, and then every day take the things of the day as God's will for you, and do your best to work something of the ideals into the life; then you will be doing God's will for you.

This is what we find when we ask the life of Jesus what it means to do the will of God. We find in him the spirit that takes every day what comes as from the Father and makes the best of it. He knew what was the true ideal of life as God thought of it, and he lived and worked for that. And every day, if God sent him what would further his endeavor to live for the principles of the divine life, he took it and was glad and made the most of it; but if God saw fit to send him what hindered and thwarted his work, what made his life seem a failure, then he stood up to the trial manfully, strongly and carried his ideal in the face of the thing that opposed it, still know-

Faith Building.

ing that what the hard day brought was the will of God no less than what the easy one brought; and that in the struggle against that which was hard he was doing God's will no less than in the triumphant use of that which was easy.

When the men he eagerly wanted to reach turned away from him, when the leaders rejected him, he said : " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes ; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." When God brought a great crowd around him so that they pressed upon him, he rejoiced and worked for them ; but when God led him to Jacob's well, and one woman only was there to be helped, he rejoiced and did the work which the will of God had for him to do there, just as if there had been thousands to be reached by it. He gave thanks when he broke bread ; but he also gave thanks when there was no bread to break, when he had not where to lay his head. Doing the will of God was an every-day, all-day matter to him. It was the thing for which his life was given him, the one end and aim of his earthly experience. "Thy will be done on earth" was what he taught his followers to pray and by that prayer he lived.

The One Duty.

This one duty depends upon the one truth which Jesus teaches us. We are to do the will of God because God is our Father. The reason Jesus could take whatever came and give thanks was because life to him was the will of the Father and he knew the Father was love. It was not that joy and sorrow were indifferent to him ; to him, as to you, sorrow meant pain and trouble and perplexity. And yet, so sure was he of his Father, that, even in the midst of the pain and perplexity of the worst of sorrows, he could take what life brought as best and right, because he was sure that God was good. If one believes heartily that God who sends us our daily life is the Father who loves us, then doing the will of God is for him the only thing worth doing. There is the simple, grand programme for the life of the follower of Jesus. And what a programme it is. How all other duties grow out of it. How it dignifies daily life to bring God into it all. If we said of all that comes, " Here is God's will for me for this moment ; let me make the most of it," what a life we would lead ! We cannot enjoy all that the Father sends us ; we cannot understand all that he sends. Many things were painful to Jesus which yet he knew were the will of the Father ; " Even so, Father, for so it seemed

Faith Building.

good in thy sight," was enough for him to understand about much that came to him. But we can take it all, as he did, as the will of God our Father. God is my Father; all of my life is his will for me; I am here to do that will; there is a simple, practical faith, which is enough, if believed with all your heart, to make your life strong, manly, Christian.

V.

THE CONDITIONS OF PROGRESS.

THE one who starts to build a Christian faith is beginning a long and a great task. There is much to study, and much thinking to be done. There are many teachings of Jesus about faith and duty; each of us must find them out for himself. We have seen what is the One Thing to Believe and what the One Thing to Do. We thus have a basis for faith, and the work of building it is one which we must do for ourselves. But it may be helpful to state some of the conditions of progress into truth. How can we be sure of going right? How can we know that, as we go on, we are in the way of true progress? There are certain simple conditions which it may help us to state clearly.

First of all, if you would grow into more truth, you must hold fast the great starting truths. It is not enough to have believed them once. You must keep tight hold of them; every day you must take a fresh grip on them, make them more than ever your

Faith Building.

own, keep them strong, living, active in your mind and heart; only so can you find more light. Do you remember what Jesus gave as the condition of his manifesting himself to the disciples as he did not to the world? "If a man love me he will keep my words, and then I will come and make my abode with him." If we want to have the Spirit of all truth with us more and more we must keep the words of Jesus.

There is a tendency in our minds to think that we grow in faith through giving up one truth for another. We start with one great fact; we get all there is in that for us to rest our faith and our practice upon, and then we let go of it for another; as the athlete uses the flying rings; he starts with one, lets it carry him as far as it can, then seizes another, and lets the first one go, and so on. He never has hold of more than two, sometimes only one. It is progress through letting go. We think the advance into faith is made that way. Or as the coral insects build the reef; one builds and then dies, and another builds on the work of the first. So our beliefs, we are apt to think, live and crystallize, and form a basis for new ones. But such is not the way with true faith. Real vital faith takes the starting truths and keeps them ever living; and then out of them it

The Conditions of Progress.

develops new truth. It is like the growth of a tree, in which every living cell produces others, while all go on and live, all are parts of the living organism, though some are hard and firm within, and give stability, while others are just forming, and thrilling with the new life.

The first essential to growth in Christian faith is holding to what Christian faith you already have. If you believe that Jesus is your Master, if you believe that God is your Father, if you believe that there is just one thing for you to do in this world, and that to do the will of God, *hold those beliefs* with the tightest grip your mind can give. There are two thoughts in the Epistle to the Hebrews which are very suggestive right here.

One of them is that exhortation to give earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from them. How striking is that figure! You may be asleep in the boat, or not watching the shore; all seems motionless; suddenly you wake, and find yourself already some way from land, gliding rapidly down stream; and it means work to get back. You need to moor yourself tightly to every truth you find, or you will drift away from it.

The other expression in the Epistle is that

Faith Building.

which tells us that we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our faith steadfast unto the end. We must hold fast the beginning of our faith, the starting truths, firm unto the end, if we want to be as Christ was, in our belief and our duty. The very first essential to growth into truth is to hold fast what truth we have now. Start every day with the knowledge that one thing is sure; begin every day of your life with the knowledge that God is your Father. Renew every day your consciousness that there is for you one thing, just one, to do, and that is the will of God, as he shows it to you that day. No matter how much more may come to you, in the way of truth and duty, hold these two fast. If you always keep hold with one hand of these great starting principles, you will gain far more in the end than if you seize the new truth with both hands and thus let the old go altogether. Keep these two great foundation elements in your thought and the life of Jesus in your sight all the time. One summer I was with a party which spent some time on one of the Thousand Islands, three miles from the nearest town. Sometimes we would have to row over to town in the darkness; the islands all around shut out the light, except that from a single electric lamp. We would

The Conditions of Progress.

steer for that; gradually, as we went on, other lights would shine out, till before long the whole way was illuminated. But when the lights were gleaming most brightly, we would not lose sight of that one lamp, but would still steer by it. So is it with these truths. Thank God for all the new light on truth and duty; but keep the starting truths to steer by.

Another condition of progress into the truth is that you seek earnestly and honestly for more light and truth. You will be the better off for more, for all you can get. Every new truth that proves itself to a man makes him that much stronger, and his life that much richer. You ought to desire to have all the real living truth you can get. And if you are to get it, you will have to do more than hold to the first truths; you must also seek earnestly and honestly for more.

Earnestly, I say. That is, you must make a business of it—really *search* for truth. Go to the words of Jesus and study them, find out what they say; see what Peter and Paul and John have to say in explanation of the words and life of Jesus. Men sometimes stumble on good things; but oftenest, the men who get what is good here are the men who have sought it, who have put something of their life energy into the search for it.

Faith Building.

The promise does not read, "Desire, and you shall find;" still less does it say, "Just go on and you shall stumble on the truth." It says, "*Seek*, and ye shall find." I think a good many men wonder that they do not find the truth, when they hardly think of *seeking* for it. Many times when men and women have said to me, "I have so little faith; I know so little what to believe," have I wanted to answer, "How much do you seek?" It is true that every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights, but it is equally true that those good gifts come to the one who earnestly tries to get them. Here is a man who wants to have a thorough knowledge of mathematics. He says to you, "I cannot understand why I do not know more about the principles of mathematics; I want to do it; I think about it, and wish I knew about it, but somehow my knowledge does not grow at all, spite of my wishing." You would say to him, "But how much do you study?" And then he would answer, "Oh, I read a chapter every morning, unless something interferes." You would say, "My dear fellow, how can you expect to grow in your knowledge of mathematics, if you do not study it? The trouble with you is, you do not *seek* to know. You want to, but you do not seek to." Is not that

The Conditions of Progress.

often the way with those who wonder about the smallness of their faith? They want, but they do not seek. Did you ever know an earnest student of the gospels who did not have a faith that was real and living and growing? You cannot find many of them.

But again, you must seek *honestly*. What do I mean by that? I mean that you must go to the work with the determination to take just what truth is shown you there. It may cut across your plans; no matter, take it. It may upset your notions and views; never mind, you are seeking the truth as Jesus taught it, and here it is; take it, whatever it is. It may be hard to harmonize with your own pleasures, or views, or ideas, but if you are really seeking to find the truth which Jesus has for you, you cannot pick and choose; you must take what he gives. When you are reading for pleasure, you can skip as you choose, picking out what you like. When you are reading for business, you have to read it all, and take it all, or you may not get any of it as you should. The follower of Christ should search the gospels for business, to find the truths to guide him in the one great business of his life, finding Christlikeness in character and work. The Jews searched very earnestly. Jesus said to them, "Ye search the Scriptures." But they did not search

Faith Building.

honestly. They found them testifying of Christ, and yet they would not come to him. They told Nicodemus to search and see what the Scriptures had to say about the Messiah; but they told him just what he must find there, and he knew it would not be safe to find in the writings anything but what the scribes said he ought to find there. And so, searching earnestly, but dishonestly, they found what they wanted, but not what they needed. If you want to find God's truth, you must search candidly. Seek earnestly and honestly and you will find.

But perhaps most important of all the conditions of progress into truth is this: *work into your life the truth you find*. The surest way to have truth grow and expand is to put it to use. It is like the muscles of your body. Use them and they will grow; try to save them and they will shrink and lose their power. If the outlet to the mill from the hopper is clogged you will very soon find that more grain cannot be poured in. The outlet from your mind to your life must be open and free, so that the truth can pass into action, if more truth is to enter in.

God gives you truth to believe, in order that you may use it as food for your will, as material for action. If you keep it stored in your mind he will not give you more; but if

The Conditions of Progress.

you use it and work it into your life then more will surely come. The condition of more light is walking towards the light you see.

The Jews wanted to know the truth. They asked, and very naturally, "How can we be sure about this man and his claims? Here is a man from Nazareth, brought up in lowly life; how can we know that he is the Messiah?" What did Jesus answer? Did he tell them to examine and see? Sometimes he did. But far oftener he said to them that if they would earnestly live by what they knew they would see the truth. It was because they were hypocrites, men who did not deal fairly with what truth they had, that they could not see rightly. The most characteristic words of Christ to them were: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Do God's will as you already know it; then other truth will be plain to you.

And so the great thing is that you should take what you are sure of now and work it into your life; then other truth will come surely. As you search the words of Jesus for directions about your life you will find something which appeals to you; you will say, whatever else may be doubtful, this at

Faith Building.

any rate is sure, and is for me to believe and to act upon. Well, take that one thing and live by it awhile. Get it not only well in mind, not only by heart, as we say, so that you can repeat it, but get it so by life that you will act by it, and then you will find something else to be true also ; then live by that, and so on. God gives more truth to the man who uses what he has of truth already.

Truth in the mind is grain stored in the granary ; it may keep there for an indefinite time without deterioration. But truth in the life is grain sown ; it will spring up and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

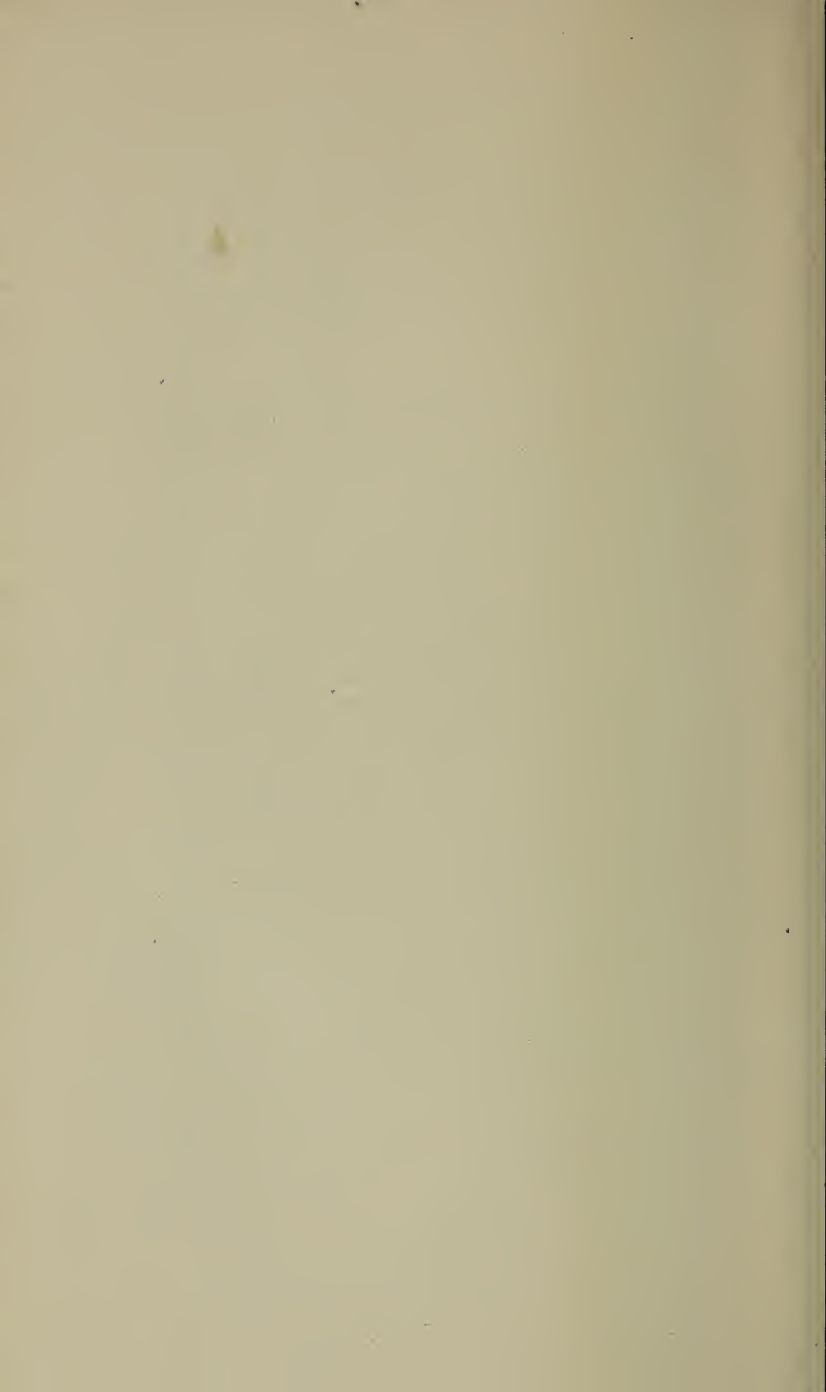
Any one who starts with the foundations of Christian faith and then observes these conditions, holding fast what is sure, seeking to know more, and patiently working into the life what becomes clear to the mind, will grow into the truth more and more under the guidance of the promised Spirit.

And now, as we close these simple and rudimentary thoughts on a subject so vast that our whole life is not long enough to exhaust it, let us return to that with which we started ; for the one thing above all else to which man's mind and life must cling is Christ himself. Christ and Christ only is the religion of Christians. Your faith must rest in him ; your life must be built on him.

The Conditions of Progress.

The one essential thing is not theology ; it is not conscience ; it is not the Bible ; the one essential thing, to which conscience, and creed, and Bible, do homage, is Christ, the only Master of Christians. Get your life-ideals from him ; test all truth by him ; cling to him.

Once Jesus was teaching strange and new truths. Many stumbled at them, and left him, went back to their homes. Jesus asked the twelve, " Will ye also go away ? " Peter answered for them, " Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the words of eternal life." There was much that was dark to them. But one thing they did know ; Jesus had the words of eternal life and they would come to him for those words, learn them one by one and live them one by one, for only in such simple reliance upon him as Teacher and Master could they find the principle of true living. Have that kind of faith. Put Christ above all else. Make him the centre, the sum, the end, of your thinking, your speaking, your acting. Then even your little faith will be truly Christian and will grow to be more and more. For he is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, and all living faith draws its life from him.



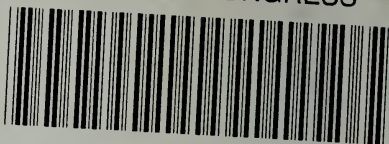
Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: August 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

BT 771

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 651 668 3

